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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 002179

SIPDIS

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LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: GOZ BLAMES HARARE CITY COUNCIL FOR WATER
SHORTAGES, SUSPENDS SIX MDC COUNCILORS

REF: HARARE 1973

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

1. (C) SUMMARY: For the past several weeks, the government press has blamed Harare's MDC-dominated City Council for myriad woes and has depicted a Council mired in personnel conflicts and improper procedures. It is possible the GOZ is gearing up to dismiss the entire Council and replace it with a ruling commission--something it has done in recent years with ZANU-PF councils. The MDC for its part is struggling to enforce party discipline while maintaining unity. END SUMMARY.

Water - Dirty and in Short Supply

2. (U) The government-controlled Herald has been running one to three articles daily on Harare's water crisis for the past week; articles on the water crisis have been a regular feature in the paper for the past year. According to The Herald, residents in high-density suburbs of Mabvuku, Tafara, Hatcliffe, Epworth, Greendale and Hogerty Hill are porting water in wheelbarrows from nearby reservoirs, and those with wells on their property are selling buckets of water to their neighbors. In several areas, water supplies have been intermittent since August 2002. Some neighborhoods are now facing daily shortages with no water, or insufficient amounts to even flush toilets--creating disease-spreading conditions--according to the Herald.

3. (SBU) Most of the recent articles blame the Harare City Council for failing to address this crisis adequately, even as the same articles acknowledge that Harare City Councils since the 1990s have failed to make adequate upgrades to water-pumping and treatment systems. The Herald reported that Harare city engineers have been predicting this crisis for years. (Note: Suspended Harare Mayor Elias Mudzuri is a former Harare city engineer. End Note.)

4. (U) The Herald reported that the city's pumping capacity is 580 megaliters daily, whereas demand is 700 megaliters, with population growing at seven percent annually. Similar situations exist in a host of Zimbabwean cities, where drought, equipment failure, and a declining revenue base handicap delivery of most municipal sources.

5. (C) A quick poll of Embassy local staff revealed that several neighborhoods, both high and low density, have experienced water shortages, or no water, intermittently for the past month or so. Most people subject to shortages get water from neighbors with wells or from nearby reservoirs or streams. There have been no reports of riots or strong public outcry against the problem.

6. (U) On October 14, The Herald reported that supplies of oxygen gas for the City of Harare's ambulances and hospitals had become erratic, and that some newborn babies had died because of it.

7. (C) Over lunch on October 23, the Ambassador told MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube that the MDC was paying a political price by allowing city services to fall victim to the disruptive tactics of Minister Chombo. Tsvangirai agreed that the MDC could not dismiss the need for adequate delivery of services in Harare, but observed that the MDC faced "acute acrimony" with the Ministry of Local Government. Ncube said that the party was simply not prepared for this level of central government hostility, and conceded that the MDC leadership needed to coordinate better with the council.

Hiring, Firing, Rehiring, Refiring

8. (U) Both the independent press and The Herald have reported recently on a drama within the Harare City Council concerning the firing and rehiring of Town Clerk Nomutsa Chideya. Mudzuri fired Chideya in October 2002, but he was reinstated after the Mayor was suspended. The Council

suspended him (again) on October 1, but reinstated him in mid October under pressure from the Ministry (see below). In the first week of October, Chideya suspended City Treasurer Misheck Mubvumbi for not cooperating with the Commission set up to investigate Mudzuri. Despite documentary evidence that he had cooperated with the Commission, police enforced Mubvumbi's suspension, and his salary and benefits have been withdrawn.

19. (U) On October 21, Minister of Local Government Ignatius Chombo suspended six councilors, reportedly for objecting to Chideya's reinstatement and disrupting council meetings. The six councilors are Falls Nhari, Fani Munengami, Jerome O'Brien, Kenneth Nhemachena, Benjamin Maimba and Tsaaurai Marima. The Ministry of Local Government had previously attempted to suspend Nhari, Munengami and O'Brien and three other MDC councilors but the suspensions were overruled by the High Court on September 11 because the Minister himself had not signed them (reftel).
Freshman Cracking Under Pressure

10. (C) As reported reftel, although forty-four out of forty-five Harare councilors are from the MDC, about twelve councilors are seen to be accommodating the ruling party, about twelve are towing the MDC line, and the remaining twenty seem to be unaligned. The councilors suspended by the Ministry are some who were towing the MDC line. Combined Harare Residents' Association Chairman Mike Davies suggested that councilors fear that the Minister will suspend them if they vote against Ministerial interests, and they are afraid of losing their salaries and benefits.

11. (C) MDC Harare provincial head Morgan Femai said that Minister Chombo invited councilors to an all-expenses paid retreat to Victoria Falls in early October at which he gave some of them spending money--allegedly Z\$260,000 (US\$46.00). When the councilors got back to Harare Femai said that the Minister communicated to those who had taken the money that they would need to vote however the Minister said they should, or they would need to return the money. Femai said that in a mid-October council meeting concerning the reinstatement of the Town Clerk, some councilors boycotted, others abstained, but some voted for the reinstatement, even though the council had voted for his suspension on October 1 and councilors had agreed in a previous MDC caucus to maintain the suspension.

12. (C) Femai said that the Minister rejected the council's budget submission in June, and instead proposed a different budget which included the additional employment of some 800 ZANU-PF youths as general laborers. Femai said that many councilors were to afraid to speak out against the new budget and instead voted to approve it.

13. (C) Both Femai and Chaibva complained that many of the MDC's Harare City councilors were political freshman, unable to comprehend the issues and implications of this type of complicit voting. Chaibva said a primary problem was a simple lack of intellectual capacity, and Femai said that the MDC's vetting of future council candidates would need to be more rigorous in the future.

MDC SNAFU in Suspending Councilors -----

14. (C) On about October 15, Femai attempted to suspend eight of the MDC councilors who have been accommodating the ruling party from their positions as councilors for failing to follow MDC directives. MDC Shadow Minister of Local Government Gabriel Chaibva said the suspensions were improper because under the Zimbabwe and MDC constitutions, the MDC does not have the authority to suspend its own councilors from their positions as councilors. Several of the eight suspended did hold positions within the party in the Harare provincial structure, such as treasurer and youth chair. Although the MDC leadership had authorized the suspensions, the result has been confusion. Chaibva said that the MDC leadership, represented by Secretary General Welshman Ncube, overturned the councilor suspensions, and instead authorized Femai to suspend the councilors only from their positions within the Harare provincial structure.

15. (C) Chaibva said that under the MDC's constitution, MDC National Disciplinary Committee hearings were necessary to request a councilor to resign--those hearings are now scheduled and might be completed within two to three weeks. Party President Morgan Tsvangirai confirmed to the Ambassador on October 23 that some disciplinary action was likely within two weeks. However, even if the Disciplinary Committee requests that these councilors resign, under Zimbabwean law they have no obligation to do so. The MDC could then expel them from the party, but many want to avoid such divisive action. Unlike party-expelled parliamentarians, Zimbabwean law does not require councilors expelled from their party to be replaced in council. If they resign their positions, a

by-election would be scheduled. Miffed that his disciplinary efforts were undermined despite prior consultations with the MDC leadership, Femai nevertheless denied divisiveness within the MDC in conversations with Emboffs. The result seems to have been confusion over procedural and legal matters. Both Femai and Chaibva emphasized the need to enforce party discipline, and Femai criticized the Secretary General's leniency with recalcitrant elements as "potentially disastrous" in the long run. Suspended Mayor Mudzuri is also frustrated that his efforts to sideline those MDC councilors who have cooperated with Minister Chombo have failed.

16. (C) COMMENT: The GOZ's strategy of overturning council decisions, publicizing water and oxygen shortages, and fomenting dissent within the Harare City Council is essentially fomenting dissent within the MDC. Civil society observers and MDC members fear that the GOZ may be preparing to dismiss the entire council and replace it with a ruling commission--as was done with a ZANU-PF council from 1999 until the current council and suspended mayor were elected in March 2002. At this point the GOZ appears to be successfully continuing with its strategy to excise councilors who oppose ruling party interests, and rewarding councilors and officials who support them. In the meantime, the MDC's inability so far to resolve competing priorities of discipline and unity in Harare politics are giving it a black eye.

SULLIVAN